

THE
Folly of Atheism,
And (what is now called) *DEISM*;
Even with respect to the *Present Life*.

A
SERMON

Preached at

St. Martin's in the Fields,

MARCH the 7th. 1691.

Being the *First* of the Lecture Founded by
the Honourable *ROBERT BOYLE*, Esquire.

By *RICHARD BENTLEY*, M. A.
Chaplain to the Right Reverend Father in God,
EDWARD, Lord Bishop of *Worcester*.

The Fourth Edition.

L O N D O N,

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Mar. 18th - 9¹/₂.

Ra. Barker.



To my most Honoured Patrons,
TRUSTEES appointed by the Will of the
Honourable Robert Boyle, Esq;

The Right Reverend Father in God,
Thomas, Lord Bishop of Lincoln,
Sir Henry Asburst, K^t and Baronet.
Sir John Rotheram, Serjeant at Law.
John Evelyn, senior, Esquire.

Most Honoured,

GOD having disposed the Heart of that incomparable Person, the Honourable ROBERT BOYLE, Esquire, lately deceased, the Glory of our Nation and Age, whose Charity and Goodness were as Universal as his Learning and Fame; " To
" settle an Annual Salary for some Divine or
" Preaching Minister, who shall be enjoined to
" perform the Offices following: 1. To preach
" Eight Sermons in the Year, for proving the
" Christian Religion against notorious Infidels,
" viz. Atheists, Deists, Pagans, Jews and Mahometans;
" not descending to any Controversies that are a-

The Epistle Dedicatory.

“ mong Christians themselves : These Lectures to
“ be on the *First Monday* of the respective Months
“ of *January, February, March, April, May, Septem-*
“ *ber, October, November*; in such Church as the
“ Trustees shall from time to time appoint : 2. To
“ be assisting to all Companies, and encouraging
“ them in any Undertaking for propagating the
“ Christian Religion : 3. To be ready to satisfie
“ such Real Scruples as any may have concerning
“ those Matters ; and to answer such new Objecti-
“ ons or Difficulties as may be started, to which
“ good Answers have not yet been made : *You*
have been pleased to believe me able in some measure to
perform these Offices, and to command this First Essay
to be made publick. I am very sensible of the great Ho-
nour, as well as the great Extent and Difficulty of the
Task ; and shall endeavour to the utmost of my poor
ability to answer the religious and generous Design of
that Excellent Person, and the good Opinion you have
entertained of,

My most Honoured Patrons,

Your very obliged and humble Servant,

R. Bentley.

T H E
Folly of Atheism, &c.

Psalm XIV. verse 1.

The Fool hath said in his Heart, There is no God; they are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doth good.

I Shall not now make any enquiry about the time and occasion and other circumstances of composing this *Psalm*: nor how it comes to pass, that with very little variation we have it twice over, both here the 14th. and again number the 53d. Not that these and such like are not important considerations in themselves; but that I think them improper now, when we are to argue and expostulate with such Persons, as allow no Divine Authority to our Text; and profess no greater, or, it may be they will say, less Veneration for these Sacred Hymns, than for the profane Songs of *Anacreon* or *Horace*. So that although I my self do really believe, that all such as *say in their Hearts, There is no God*, are foolish and corrupt, both in Understanding and Will; because I see that infinite

Wife.



Wisdom himself has pronounced them to be so: nevertheless this Argument would at present have no force upon these men, till in due time and method we have evinced the sufficient Authority of Holy Scripture. But however there are other Books extant, which they must-needs allow of as proper Evidence; even the mighty Volumes of visible Nature, and the everlasting Tables of Right Reason; wherein, if they do not wilfully shut their Eyes, they may read their own Folly written by the Finger of God in a much plainer and more terrible Sentence, *Dan. 5. 5.* than *Belshazzar's* was by the Hand upon the Wall.

And as the impious Principles of these Persons do preclude any argumentation from the revealed Word of God: so they prevent us also from speaking at present to the second part of the *Text*. The whole verse hath apparently two propositions; the one denoting the *Folly of Atheism*, *The Fool hath said in his Heart, There is no God*: the second declaring the *Corruption and Flagitiousness of Life* that naturally attend it, *They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doth good*. Now this latter part to a genuine Atheist is mere *Jargon*, as they love to call it; an empty sound of words without any signification. He allows no Natural Morality, nor any other distinction of Good and Evil, Just and Unjust; than as Human Institution and

and the modes and fashions of various Countries do denominate them. The most Heroical Actions or detestable Villanies are in the nature of the things indifferent to his approbation; if by secrecy they are alike conceal'd from Rewards or Punishments, from Ignominy or Applause. So that till we have proved in its proper place the eternal and essential Difference between Vertue and Vice, we must forbear to urge Atheists with the *Corruption* and *Abominableness* of their Principles. But I presume, the first part of the Text, the *Folly and Sottishness of Atheism* (which shall be the subject of this Discourse) will be allowed to come home to their case; since they make such a noisie pretence to Wit and Sagacity: and I believe several of them first engage in that Labyrinth of Nonsense and Folly out of an absurd and preposterous affectation of seeming Wiser than their Neighbours.

But before I proceed any further, it will be necessary to clear and vindicate this expression of the *Psalmist*, *The Fool hath said in his Heart, There is no God.* For I know not any Interpreters, that will allow it to be spoken of such, as flatly deny the Being of God; but of them that believing his Existence, do yet seclude him from directing the Affairs of the World, from observing and judging the Actions of Men. I suppose they might be induced to this,
from

from the commonly received notion of an Innate Idea of God, imprinted upon every Soul of Man at their Creation, in Characters that can never be defaced. Whence it will follow, that Speculative Atheism doth subsist only in *our* Speculation; whereas really Human Nature cannot be guilty of the crime: that indeed a few sensual and voluptuous Persons may for a season eclipse this native Light of the Soul; but can never so wholly smother and extinguish it, but that at some lucid intervals it will recover it self again, and shine forth to the conviction of their Conscience. And therefore they believed, that the words would not admit of a strict and rigorous interpretation; but ought to be so temper'd and accommodated to the nature of things, as that they may describe those profane Persons; who though they do *not, nor cannot* really doubt in their hearts of the Being of God, yet do openly deny his Providence in the course of their Lives. Now if this be all that is meant by the Text, I do not see how we can defend not only the fitness and propriety, but the very truth of the expression. As to that natural and indelible signature of God, which Human Souls in their first Origin are supposed to be stamp'd with, I shall shew at a fitter opportunity, that it is a mistake, and that we have no need of it in our Disputes against Atheism. So that being free from that prejudice, I interpret:

terpret the words of the *Text* in the literal acceptation, which will likewise take in the Expositions of others. For I believe that the Royal Psalmist in this comprehensive brevity of speech, *There is no God*, hath concluded all the various Forms of Impiety; whether of such as excludes the Deity from governing the World by his Providence, or judging it by his Righteousness, or creating it by his Wisdom and Power. Because the consequence and result of *all* these Opinions is terminated in down-right Atheism. For the Divine inspection into the Affairs of the World doth necessarily follow from the Nature and Being of God. And he that denies this, doth implicitly deny his Existence: he may acknowledge what he will with his mouth, but *in his heart he hath said, There is no God.* A God, therefore a Providence; was a general argument of vertuous men, and not peculiar to the *Stoicks* alone. And again, *No Providence, therefore no God*; was the most plausible reason, and the most frequent in the mouths of Atheistical men. So that it seems to be agreed on all hands, that the Existence of God and his Government of the World do mutually suppose and imply one another.

There are some Infidels among us, that not only disbelieve the *Christian Religion*; but impugn the assertion of a *Providence*, of the *Immortality* of the

Soul, of an Universal Judgment to come, and of any *Incorporeal* Effence : and yet to avoid the odious name of *Atheists*, would shelter and skreen themselves under a new one of *Deists*, which is not quite so obnoxious. But I think the *Text* hath cut them short, and precluded this subterfuge ; in as much as it hath declared, that all such wicked Principles are coincident and all one in the issue with the rankest *Atheism* : *The Fool*, that doth exempt the Affairs of the World from the ordination and disposal of God, hath said in his heart, *There is no God* at all. It was the opinion of many of the Ancients, that *Epicurus* introduced a *Deity* into his Philosophy, not because he was persuaded of his Existence, (for when he had brought him upon the Stage of Nature, he made him only *Muta persona*, and interdicted him from bearing any Part in it,) but purely that he might not incur the offence of the Government. Wherefore he was generally suspected *Verbis reliquisse Deum, re sustulisse*; to have framed on purpose such a contemptible paultry *Hypothesis* about him, as indeed left the Name and Title of God in the World ; but nothing of his Nature and Power. Just as a Philosopher of our own Age gave a ludicrous and fictitious notion about the *Rest of the Earth*, to evade the hard censure and usage, which *Galileo* had lately met with. For my own part, as I do not

*Possidon.
apud Ciceron.
Plutarch.
&c.*

*Mr. Des
Cartes.*

exclude this reason from being a grand occasion of Epicurus's Deism; so I believe that He and Democritus too were compelled to it likewise by the necessity of their own Systems. For seeing they explain'd the Phænomena of *Vision*, *Imagination*, and *Thought* it self, by certain thin fleeces of Atoms, that flow incessantly from the surfaces of bodies, and by their subtilty and fineness do penetrate any obstacle, and yet retain the exact figures and lineaments of the several bodies from which they proceed; and in this manner insinuating themselves into the Eyes, and the Contexture of the Soul, do there produce and excite Sensation and Perception of themselves: in consequence therefore of this *Hypothesis* they were obliged to maintain that we could have no Phantasia, Idea or Conception of any thing, but what did really subsist either intire or in its several parts. Whence it followed, that mankind could have no imagination of *Jupiter* or *Mars*, of *Minerva* or *Isis*; if there were not actually such Beings in nature to emit those *Effluvia*, which gliding into the Soul must beget such an imagination. And thence it was, that those Philosophers adapted their description of the Deity to the vulgar apprehensions of those times; Gods and Goddesses innumerable, and all of human figure: because otherwise the conceptions of mankind about them could not possibly be accounted

for from their Physiology. So that if *Epicurus* and *Democritus* were in earnest about their Philosophy, they did necessarily and really believe the *Existence of the Gods*. But as to the nature and authority of them, they bereaved that *Jupiter* of his Thunder and Majesty, forbidding him to look or peep abroad, so much as to enquire what News in the Infinite Space about him; but to content himself and be happy with an eternal laziness and dozing, unless some rambling Troops of *Atoms* upon the dissolution of a neighbouring World might chance to awake him. Now because no *Israelite* in the days of the *Psalmist* is likely to have been so curious about natural Knowledge, as to believe the Being of God for such a quaint and airy reason as this, when he had once boldly denied his Dominion over the World; and seeing that there is not now one Infidel living, so ridiculous as to pretend to solve the Phænomena of *Sight*, *Fancy* or *Cogitation* by those fleeting superficial films of bodies: I must beg leave to think that the *Fool in the Text* was a thorough confirmed *Atheist*; and that the modern disguised *Deists* do only call themselves so for the former reason of *Epicurus*, to decline the publick odium and resentment of the Magistrate; and do cover the most arrant Atheism under the mask and shadow of a Deity, by which they understand no more than
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some eternal inanimate Matter, some universal Nature, and Soul of the World, void of all sense and cogitation, endued with none at all, much less with Infinite Wisdom and Goodness; and therefore in this present Discourse they may deservedly come under that Character which the Text hath given of them, of *Fools that have said in their Hearts, There is no God.*

And now having thus far cleared our way; in the next place we shall offer some notorious Proofs of the gross *Folly* and stupidity of Atheists.

If a Person that had a fair Estate in reversion, which in all probability he would speedily be possess'd of, and of which he might reasonably promise to himself a long and happy Enjoyment, should be assured by some skilfull Physician; that in a very short time he would inevitably fall into a Disease, that would so totally deprive him of his Understanding and Memory, that he should lose the knowledge of all things without him, nay all consciousness and sense of his own Person and Being: If, I say, upon a certain belief of this indication, the man should appear over-joyed at the News, and be mightily transported with the discovery and expectation; would not all that saw him be astonished at such behaviour? Would they not be forward to conclude that the Distemper had seized him already, and that

that even then the miserable Creature was become a mere *Fool* and an *Idiot*? Now the Carriage of our *Atheists* or *Deists* is infinitely more amazing than this; no dotage so insatiate, no phrensie so extravagant as theirs. They have been educated in a *Religion*, that instructed them in the knowledge of a *Supreme Being*; a Spirit most excellently glorious, superlatively Powerfull and Wise and Good, Creator of all things out of nothing; That hath endued the Sons of Men, his peculiar Favorites, with a Rational Spirit, and hath placed them as Spectators in this noble Theatre of the World, to view and applaud these glorious Scenes of Earth and Heaven, the workmanship of his hands; That hath furnished them in general with a sufficient store of all things, either necessary or convenient for life; and particularly to such as fear and obey him, hath promised a supply of all wants, a deliverance and protection from dangers; *That they that seek him, shall want no manner of thing that is good.* And besides his

Pf. 34. 9.

Joh. 3. 16.

2 Tim. 1.
10.Matt. 11.
30.

munificence to them in this life; *He so loved the world, that he sent his Onely-begotten Son*, the exprefs Image of his Substance, and Partaker of his eternal Nature and Glory, to bring *Life and Immortality to light*, and to tender them to Mankind upon fair and gracious Terms; That if they submitted to his *ease yoke and light burthen*, and observed his Commandments *which*

are

are not grievous, He then gave them the promise of ^{1 Joh. 5. 3.} eternal Salvation; He had reserved for them in Heaven ^{Heb. 5. 9.} an Inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fa- ^{1 Pet. 1. 4.} deth not away; He had prepared for them an unspeakable, unconceivable Perfection of Joy and Bliss, *things that Eye had not seen, nor Ear heard, neither have entred* ^{1 Cor. 2. 9.} *into the heart of man.* What a delightful and ravishing Hypothesis of Religion is this? And in this Religion they have had their Education. Now let us suppose some great Professor in Atheism to suggest to some of these; That all this is a mere dream and imposture; that there is no such excellent Being, as they suppose, that created and preserves them; that all about them is dark senseless Matter, driven on by the blind impulses of Fatality and Fortune; that men first sprung up, like Mushrooms, out of the mud and slime of the Earth; and that all their Thoughts, and the whole of what they call Soul, are only various Action and Repercussion of small Particles of Matter, kept a-while a moving by some Mechanism and Clock-work, which finally ceases and perishes by death. If it be true then (as we daily find it is) that they listen with complacency to these horrid Suggestions; if they let go their hope of Everlasting Life with willingness and joy; if they entertain the Thoughts of final Perdition with exultation and triumph; ought they not to be esteem'd most

noto-

ἄθεον ὃς notorious *Fools*, even destitute of common sense,
 ἀλογον ὃς and abandon'd to a callousness and numbness of
 ἀναισθητον Soul?

Max. Tyr.

Diff. 1.

2 Tim 4. 8.

Jam. 1. 12.

2 Cor. 4.

17.

What then, is Heaven it self with its pleasures for evermore to be parted with so unconcernedly? Is a *Crown of Righteousness*, a *Crown of Life*, to be surrendered with laughter? Is an exceeding and eternal weight of *Glory* too light in the balance against the hopeless death of the Atheist, and utter extinction? 'Twas a noble saying of the Emperor *Marcus*, That he would not endure to live one day in the world, if he did not believe it to be under the government of Providence. Let us but imagin that excellent Person confuted and satisfied by some *Epicurean* of his time; that all was but *Atoms*, and *Vacuum*, and *Necessity*, and *Chance*. Would he have been so pleased and delighted with the conviction? would He have so triumph'd in being overcome? or rather, as he hath told us, would he not have gone down with sorrow and despair to the grave? Did I but once see an Atheist lament and bewail himself; That upon a strict and impartial examination he had found to his cost, that all was a mistake; that the Prerogative of Human Nature was vanished and gone; those glorious hopes of Immortality and Bliss, nothing but cheating Joys and pleasant Delusions; that he had undone himself by losing the comfortable Error,

Error, and would give all the World to have better arguments for Religion: there would be great hopes of prevailing upon such an Atheist as this. But, alas! there are none of them of this temper of mind; there are none that *understand and seek after God*; v. 2. of this Psalm ver. 4. Act. 13. 46. they have *no knowledge*, nor any desire of instruction; they *thrust the Word of God from them, and judge themselves unworthy of everlasting life*; they willingly prefer Darkness before Light; and obstinately choose to perish for ever in the Grave, rather than be Heirs of Salvation in the Resurrection of the Just. These certainly are the *Fools* in the Text, indocil, intractable Fools, whose stolidity can baffle all arguments, and is proof against Demonstration it self; *whose end* Phil. 3. 19. (as the words of St. Paul do truly describe them) *whose end is destruction*, an eternal Deprivation of Being; *whose God is their belly*, the gratification of sensual Lusts; *whose Glory is in their shame*, in the debasing and villainizing of Mankind to the condition of Beasts; *who mind earthly things*, who if (like that great Apostle) they were caught up to the third Heaven, would (as the Spies did of Canaan) *bring down an evil report* of those Regions of Bliss. And I fear, unless it please God by extraordinary methods to help 2 Cor. 12. 2. Numb. 13. 32. Mar. 9. 24. Eph. 1. 19. *their unbelief, and enlighten the eyes of their understanding*; they will carry their Atheism with them to the Pit, and the flames of Hell only must convince them of their Error.

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This supine and inconsiderate behaviour of the Atheists is so extremely absurd, that it would be deem'd incredible, if it did not occur to our daily Observation; it proclaims aloud, that they are not led astray by their Reasoning, but led captive by their Lusts to the denial of God. When the very pleasures of Paradise are condemn'd and trampled on, like Pearls cast before Swine; there's small hope of reclaiming them by arguments of Reason. But however as Solomon adviseth, we will answer these Fools not according to their Folly, lest we also be like unto them. It is expedient that we put to silence the ignorance of these foolish men, that Believers may be the more confirmed and more resolute in the Faith.

Prov. 26.4.

Did Religion bestow Heaven without any terms or conditions indifferently upon all; if the Crown of Life was hereditary, and free to Good and Bad; and not settled by Covenant upon the Elect of God only, such as live soberly and righteously and godly in this present World, I believe there would be no such thing as an Infidel among us. And without controverſie, 'tis the Way and Means of attaining to Heaven, that makes profane Scorners so willingly let go the Expectation of it. 'Tis not the Articles of the Creed, but the Duty to God and their Neighbour, that is such an inconsistent incredible Legend. They will not practise the Rules of Religion, and therefore they

Tit. 2. 12.

they cannot believe the Promises and Rewards of it.

But however let us suppose them to have acted like rational and serious Men: and perhaps upon a diligent inquisition they have found, that the Hope of Immortality deserves to be *joyfully* quitted, and that either out of *Interest* or *Necessity* which is both.

I. And first, One may conceive indeed, how there might possibly be a *necessity* of quitting it. It might be tied to such Terms, as would render it impossible ever to be obtain'd. For example, if it should be required of all the Candidates of Glory and Immortality, to give a full and knowing Assent to such things as are repugnant to common Sense, as contradict the *usual errors*, the universal Notions and indubitable maxims of Reason; if they were to believe, that One and the same Thing may *be* and *not be* at the same time and in the same respect; If allowing the received Idea's and Denominations of Numbers and Figures and Body, they must seriously affirm, that Two and Two do make a Dozen, or that the Diameter of a Circle is as long as the Circumference, or that *the same Body may be all of it in distant places at once*. I must confess that the offers of Happiness upon such Articles of Belief as these, would be mere rantalizing of Rational Creatures; and the Kingdom of Heaven would become the Inheritance

of only Idiots and Fools. For whilst a man of common Capacity doth think and reflect upon such Propositions; he cannot possibly bribe his Understanding to give a Verdict for their Truth. So that he would be quite frustrated of the Hope of Reward, upon such unpracticable Conditions as these: neither could he have any evidence of the Reality of the Promise, superior to what he is conscious to of the Falsity of the Means. Now if any Atheist can shew me in the System of Christian Religion any such absurdities and repugnancies to our natural Faculties; I will either evince them to be Interpolations and Corruptions of the Faith, or yield my self a Captive and a Profelyte to his Infidelity.

II. Or, 2dly, they may think 'tis the *Interest* of Mankind, that there should be no Heaven at all; because the Labour to acquire it is more worth than the Purchase: God Almighty (if there be one) having much overvalued the Blessings of his Presence. So that upon a fair estimation, 'tis a greater advantage to take one's swing in Sensuality, and have a glut of Voluptuousness in this life, freely resigning all pretences to future Happiness, (which, when a man is once extinguish'd by Death, he cannot be supposed either to want or desire) than to be tied up by Commandments and Rules so thwart and

Mar. 8. 34. contrary to Flesh and Blood; to take up on's Cross;

to deny himself, and refuse the Satisfaction of Natural Desires. This indeed is the true Language of Atheism, and the Cause of it too. Were not this at the bottom, no man in his wits could contemn and ridicule the expectation of Immortality. Now what power or influence can Religion have upon the minds of these men; while not only their Affections and Lusts, but their supposed Interest shall plead against it? But if we can once silence this powerfull Advocate, we shall without much difficulty carry the Cause at the Bar of impartial Reason.

Now here is a notorious instance of the Folly of Atheists, that while they repudiate all Title to the Kingdom of Heaven, merely for the present Pleasure of Body, and their boasted Tranquillity of Mind; besides the extreme madness in running such a desperate Hazard after Death, (which I will not now treat of) they unwittingly deprive themselves here of that very Pleasure and Tranquillity they seek for. For I shall now endeavour to shew, That Religion it self gives us the greatest Delights and Advantages even in this Life also, though there should prove in the event to be no Resurrection to another. *Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.* Prov. 3.17.

But before I begin that, I must occur to one specious Objection both against this Proposition and



and the past part of my discourse; Namely, that Religion doth perpetually haunt and disquiet us with dismal apprehensions of everlasting Burnings in Hell; and that there is no shelter nor refuge from those Fears, but behind the Principles of Atheism.

(1.) First therefore I will freely acknowledge to the Atheists; that some part of what hath been said is not directly conclusive against them; if they say, that before they revolted from the Faith, they had sinned away all expectation of ever arriving at Heaven: and consequently had good reason so joyfully to receive the news of Annihilation by Death as an advantageous change for the everlasting torments of the Damn'd. But because I cannot expect, that they will make such a shameless and senseless Confession, and supply us with that invincible argument against themselves: I must say again, that to prefer final Extinction before a happy Immortality does declare the most deplorable stupidity of mind. Nay although they should confess, that they believed themselves to be Reprobates, before they disbelieved Religion; and took Atheism as a sanctuary and refuge from the Terrors of Hell; yet still the imputation of *Folly* will stick upon them: in as much as they chose Atheism as an Opiate to still those frightening Apprehensions, by inducing a dulness and lethargy of mind; rather than to make use of that

that active and salutary medicine, a hearty Repen-
tance; that they did not know the *Riches of the good-ness and forbearance and long-suffering of God*, and that
a sincere Amendment of Life, was never too late
nor in vain; *Jesus Christ being the Saviour of all men*,
and a propitiation for the Sins of the whole world: *who*
came into the world to save sinners, even the chief of them
all; and died for the ungodly, and his bitterest enemies.

Rom. 2.4

1 Tim. 4.

10.

1 John 5.

14.

1 Tim. 1.15.

Rom. 5.

6, 10.

(2.) And secondly, As to the *Fears of Damnati-*
on; those Terrors are not to be charged upon Re-
ligion it self, which proceed either from the Want of
Religion, or Superstitious mistakes about it. For as
an honest and innocent Man doth know the punish-
ments, which the Laws of his Country denounce
against Felons and Murderers and Traytors, with-
out being terrifi'd or concern'd at them: So a Chri-
stian in truth as well as in name, though he believe
the consuming Vengeance prepared for the disobedi-
ent and unbelievers, is not at all dismayed at the ap-
prehensions of it. Indeed it adds spurrs, and gives
wings to his diligence, it excites him to *work out his*
Salvation with fear and trembling; a religious and in-
genuous fear, that is temper'd with hope and with
love and unspeakable joy. But he knows, that if
he fears him who is *able to destroy both soul and body in*
Hell, he needs not fear that his own soul or body
shall ever go thither.

Phil. 2.12.

Matt. 10.
28.

I allow

I allow that some debauched and profligate Wretches, or some designing perfidious Hypocrites, that are religious in outward profession, but *corrupt and abominable* in their works, are most justly as well as usually liable to these horrors of mind. 'Tis not my business to defend or excuse such as these; I must leave them, as long as they keep their *hardness and impenitent Hearts*, to those gnawing and excruciating Fears, those whips of the Divine Nemesis, that frequently scourge even Atheists themselves: For they also can never wholly extinguish these horrible forboodings of Conscience. A thousand occasions do awake the sleeping Tormentors. Any slight Consideration either of themselves, or of any thing without; whatsoever they think on, or whatsoever they look on; all do administer some reasons for suspicion and diffidence, lest possibly they may be in the wrong; and then 'tis a *fearfull thing to fall into the hands of the living God*: There are they in great fear, as 'tis in the 5th. verse of this Psalm, under terrible presages of judgment and fiery indignation. Neither can they say, That these Terrors, like Tales about Spectres, may disturb some small Pretenders and puny Novices, but dare not approach the *vere Adepti*, the Masters and Rabbies of Atheism. For 'tis well known both from ancient and modern Experience, that the very boldest of them out of their

Heb. 10.
31.

Heb. 10.
37.

Cic. Plu-
zarch, &c.

their Debauches and Company, when they chance to be surprized with Solitude or Sickness, are the most suspicious and timorous and despondent Wretches in the world: and that the boasted Happy Atheist in the Indolence of body, and an undisturbed Calm and Serenity of mind, is altogether as rare a Creature, as the *Vir Sapiens* was among the *Stoicks*; whom they often met with in Idea and Description, in Harangues and in Books, but freely own'd that he never had or was like to exist actually in Nature.

And now as to the present advantages, which we owe to Religion, they are very conspicuous; whether we consider Mankind (1.) Separately, or (2.) under Society and Government.

1. And first, in a Single Capacity. How is a good Christian animated and cheer'd by a stedfast belief of the promises of the Gospel; of an everlasting enjoyment of perfect Felicity, such as after millions of millions of Ages is still youthfull and flourishing and inviting as at the first? no wrinkles in the face, no gray hairs on the head of Eternity; no end, no diminution, no satiety of those delights. What a warm and vigorous influence does a Religious Heart feel from a firm expectation of these Glories? Certainly this Hope alone is of inestimable value; 'tis a kind of anticipation and pledge

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of those Joys; and at least gives him one Heaven upon Earth, though the other should prove a Delusion. Now what are the mighty promises of Atheism? Let us know the glorious Recompences it proposeth; utter Extinction and Cessation of Being; to be reduced to the same condition, as if we never had been born. O dismal reward of Infidelity! at which Nature does shrink and shiver with horror. What some of the * Learnedest Doctors amongst the Jews have esteem'd the most dreadful of all Punishment, and have assigned for the portion of the blackest Criminals of the Damnd; so interpreting Tophet, Abaddon, the Vale of Slaughter, and the like, for final Excision and Deprivation of Being; this Atheism exhibits to us, as an Equivalent to Heaven. We all know what hath been disputed among Schoolmen to this effect. And 'tis an observation of Plutarch, that the Generality of mankind πάντες ἡ πᾶσα, as well Women as Men, chose rather to endure all the Punishments of Hell, as described by the Poets; than part with the Hope of Immortality, though immortal only in misery, I easily grant, that this would be a very hard Bargain; and that *Not to be at all*, is more eligible, than *to be miserable always*: our Saviour himself having determin'd the question; *Wo to that man, by whom the Son of Man is betrayed; good were it for that*

* Vide Pocockii Notas ad Portam Moisis, p. 158, &c.

Plutarch.
"On εὐδαιμονίᾳ
Civ. &c.
p. 1104,
B105.
Ed. Ruald.

Mar. 14. 2.

that man, if he had never been born. But however thus much it evidently shews, That this desire of Existence is a natural Affection of the Soul; 'tis *Self-preservation* in the highest and truest meaning; 'tis interwoven in the very Frame and Constitution of Man. How then can the Atheist reflect on his own *Hypothesis* without extreme sorrow and dejection of Spirit? Will he say, that when once he is dead, this Desire will be nothing; and that he that is not, cannot lament his Annihilation? So indeed it will be, according to his Principles. But notwithstanding, while he continues in Life (which we now speak of) this dusky Scene of Horror, this melancholy Prospect of Final Perdition will frequently occur to his Fancy; the sweetest Enjoyments of Life will often become flat and insipid, will be damp'd and extinguish'd, be bitter'd and poison'd by the malignant and venomous quality of this Opinion.

Is it not more comfortable to a Man, to think well of himself, to have a high Value and Conceit of the Dignity of his Nature, to believe a noble Origination of his Race, the Off-spring and Image of the great King of Glory: rather than that men first proceeded, as Vermin are thought to do, by the sole influence of the Sun out of Dirt and Putrefaction?

Is it not a firmer foundation for Contentment

and Tranquillity, to believe that All things were at first created, and are continually order'd and disposed for the Best, and that principally for the Benefit and Pleasure of Man; than that the whole Universe is mere bungling and blundering; no Art or Contrivance to be seen int; nothing effected for any purpose and design; but all ill-favouredly cobbled and jumbled together by the unguided agitation and rude shuffles of Matter?

Can any man with a better Support under affliction, than the Friendship and Favour of Omnipotence, of Infinite Wisdom and Goodness; who is both able, and willing, and knows how to relieve him? Such a man *can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth him*, he can patiently suffer all things with cheerfull submission and resignation to the Divine Will. He has a secret Spring of spiritual Joy, and the continual Feast of a good Conscience within, that forbid him to be miserable. But what a forlorn destitute Creature is the Atheist in Distress? He hath no Friend in Extremity, but Poison or a Dagger or a Halter or a Precipice. A violent Death is the last refuge of the *Epicureans*, as well as the *Stoicks*. This, says *Lucretius*, is the distinguishing Character of a genuine Son of our Sect, that he will not endure to live in Exile and Want and Disgrace, out of a vain fear of death; but

but dispatch himself resolutely into the State of eternal Sleep and Insensibility. And yet for all this swaggering, not one of a hundred hath boldness enough to follow the Direction. The base and degenerate saying of one of them is very well known; * That *Life* is always *sweet*, and he should still desire to prolong it; though after he had been maim'd and distorted by the Rack, he should lastly be condemn'd to hang on a Gibbet.

* Meccenas apud Senec. Ep. 101. Debilem facito Marmu; debilem pedetorale, &c.

And then, as to the *Practical Rules* and Duties of Religion: as the Miracles of our Lord are peculiarly eminent about the *Lying Wonders* of Demons, in that they were not made out of vain Ostentation of Power, and to raise unprofitable Amazement; but for the real Benefit and Advantage of men, by feeding the Hungry, healing all sorts of Diseases, ejecting of Devils, and reviving the Dead: so likewise the Commands which he hath imposed on his Followers are not like the absurd Ceremonies of Pagan Idolatry, the frivolous Rites of their Initiations and Worship that might look like Incantation and Magick, but had no tendency in their Nature to make Mankind the happier. Our Saviour hath enjoyn'd us a *Reasonable Service*; accommodated to the rational part of our Nature. All his Laws are in themselves, abstracted from any Consideration of Recompence, conducive to the Temporal Interest of them that

Rom. 12. 11.

that observe them. For what can be more availing to a man's Health, or his Credit, or Estate, or Security in this World, than Charity and Meekness, than Sobriety and Temperance, than Honesty and Diligence in his Calling? Do not Pride and Arrogance infallibly meet with Contempt? Do not Contentiousness and Cruelty, and Study of Revenge seldom fail of Retaliation? Are not Envious and Covetous, Discontented and Anxious minds tormentors to themselves? Do not we see, that Slothfull and Intemperate and Incontinent persons destroy their Bodies with diseases, their Reputations with disgrace, and their Families with want? Are Adultery and Fornication forbidden only by *Moses* and *Christ*? or do not *Heathen* Law-givers punish such Enormities with Fines, or Imprisonment; with Exile, or Death? 'Twas an objection of *Julian* the Apostate; that there were no new Precepts of Morality in our Religion: *Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife.* Why all the World, says he, is agreed about these Commandments: and in every Country under Heaven, there are Laws and Penalties made to enforce all the Ten, excepting only the *Sabbath* and the *Worship of strange Gods*. We can answer him another way; but he may make our Infidels ashamed to complain of those Ordinances as hard Impositions, which the sense of all Nations has thought

thought to be reasonable: which not only the Philosophers of Greece and Italy and the ancient World; but the Banyans of *Mogul*, the Talapoins of *Siam*, the Mandarins of *China*, the Moralists of *Peru* and *Mexico*, all the Wisdom of Mankind have declared to be necessary Duties. Nay if the Atheists would but live up to the Ethicks of *Epicurus* himself, they would make few or no Profelytes from the Christian Religion. None revolt from the Faith for such things, as are thought peculiar to Christianity; Not because they must love and pray for their enemies, but because they must not poison or stab them: not because they must not look upon a Woman to lust after her, but because they are much more restrain'd from the Perpetration of their Lusts. If wanton glances and libidinous thoughts had been permitted by the Gospel, they would have apostatized nevertheless. This we may conjecture from what *Plato* and others have told us, that it was commonly *ἐνέκλετα ἡδονῶν καὶ ὕβριος* Plato de Legib. lib. 10. p. 886. Ed. Step. their immoderate Affections and Lusts, that in the very times of Paganism induced men to be Atheists. It seems their impure and brutal Sensuality was too much confined by the Religion of those Countries, where even *Venus* and *Bacchus* had their Temples. Let not therefore voluptuous Atheists lay all the fault of their Sins upon the Infirmary of Human Nature; nor plead that Flesh and Blood can-

cannot resist those Temptations, which have all their force and prevalence from long Custom and inveterated Habit. What enticement, what pleasure is there in common profane Swearing? yet neither the fear of God nor of the Law will persuade men to leave it. 'Tis prevailing Example that hath now made it fashionable, but it hath not always been so, nor will be hereafter. So other Epidemical Vices, they are rise and predominant only for a season, and must not be ascribed to Human Nature in the Lump. In some Countries Intemperance is a necessary part of Conversation; in others Sobriety is a Vertue Universal, without any respect to the Duties of Religion. Nor can they say, that this is only the difference of Climate, that inclines one Nation to Concupiscence and Sensual Pleasures; another to Blood-thirstiness and Desire of Revenge. It would discover great ignorance in History, not to know that in all Climates a whole People has been over-run with some recently invented or newly imported kind of Vice, which their Grandfathers never knew. In the latest accounts of the Country of *Guiana*, we are told that the eating of Human Flesh is the beloved pleasure of those Savages: two Nations of them by mutual devouring are reduced to two handfulls of men. When the Gospel of our Saviour was preached to them, they received it with glad-

gladness of heart; they could be brought to forgo Plurality of Wives; though that be the main impediment to the conversion of the *East-Indies*. But the great Stumbling-block with these *Americans*, and the only Rock of Offence was the forbidding them to eat their *Enemies*: That irresistible Temptation made them quickly to revolt and relapse into their Infidelity. What, must we impute this to the tempera-
ture of the Air, to the nature of the Soil, to the influence of the Stars? Are these *Barbarians* of Man-eating Constitutions, that they so hanker after this Diet, which we cannot imagin without horror? Is not the same thing practised in other parts of that Continent? Was it not so of *Europe* of old, and is it not now so in *Africa*? If an Eleventh Commandment had been given, *Thou shalt not eat Human flesh*; would not these Canibals have esteem'd it more difficult than all the Ten? And would not they have really had as much reason as our Atheists, to plead the power of the Temptation, and the propensity of Flesh and Blood? how impudent are they then, that traduce the easie and gracious Conditions of the Gospel for Unreasonable and Tyrannical Impositions? *Are not God's ways equal?* O ye Children of Destruction, *and are not your ways unequal?*

II. Secondly and lastly, As to the benign Influence of Religion upon *Communities* and Governments,

Luke 19.
22.

habemus confitentes Reos; 'tis so apparent and unquestionable, that 'tis one of the wise Objections of the Atheist, That it first was contrived and introduced by Politicians to bring the wild and stragling Herds of Mankind under Subjection and Laws. *Out of thy own mouth shalt thou be jugded, thou wicked servant.*

Thou say'st that the wise Institutors of Government, Souls elevated above the ordinary pitch of men, thought Religion necessary to Civil Obedience. Why then dost thou endeavour to undermine this foundation, to undo this Cement of Society, and to reduce all once again to thy imaginary State of Nature and Original Confusion? No Community ever was or can be begun or maintain'd, but upon the Basis of Religion. What Government can be imagin'd without Judicial Proceedings? and what methods of Judicature without a Religious Oath; which implies and supposes an Omniscient Being, as conscious to its falshood or truth, and a revenger of Perjury? So that the very nature of an Oath (and therefore of Society also) is subverted by the Atheist; who professeth to acknowledge nothing superiour to himself, no omnipresent observer of the actions of men. For an * Atheist to compose a *System of Politicks* is as absurd and ridiculous, as *Epicurus's Sermons* were about † *Sanctity* and *Religious Worship*. But there was hope, that the Doctrine of absolute

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* Hobbes
de Cive,
Leviath.

† Πνεὺς Ὁ-
μῶν, &
De sancti-
tate & de
pietate
adversus
Deos. Cic.

uncontroulable Power and the formidable Name of *Leviathan* might flatter and bribe the Government into a toleration of *Infidelity*. We need have no recourse to notion and supposition; we have sad experience and convincing example before us, what a rare Constitution of Government may be had in a whole Nation of Atheists. The Natives of *Newfoundland* and *New France* in *America*, as they are said to live without any sense of Religion, so they are known to be destitute of its advantages and blessings; without any Law or form of Community; without any Literature or Sciences or Arts; no Towns, no fixed Habitations, no Agriculture, no Navigation. And 'tis entirely owing to the power of Religion, that the whole World is not at this time as barbarous as they. And yet I ought not to have called these miserable Wretches a *Nation of Atheists*. They cannot be said to be of the Atheist's opinion; because they have no opinion at all in the matter: They do not say in their hearts, *There is no God*; for they never once deliberated, if there was one or no. They no more deny the Existence of a Deity; than they deny the *Antipodes*, the *Copernican System*, or the *Satellites Jovis*: about which they have had no notion nor conception at all. 'Tis the Ignorance of those poor Creatures, and not their *Impiety*: their Ignorance as much to be pitied, as the *Impiety* of the *Atheists* is to be

De Laet.
p. 34, 47,
50.
Voyage du
Sieur de
Cham-
plain. p.
28, & 93.

detested and punish'd. 'Tis of mighty importance to the Government, to put some timely stop to the spreading Contagion of this *Pestilence that walketh by day*, that dares to disperse its cursed seeds and principles in the face of the Sun. The *Fool* in the Text had only said *in his heart*, *There is no God*: he had not spoken it aloud, nor openly blasphem'd in places of publick resort. There's too much reason to fear, that some of all orders of men, even Magistracy it self, have taken the Infection: a thing of dreadfull consequence and most imminent danger. *Epicurus* was not a little wiser than ordinary, when he so earnestly advised his Disciples against meddling in publick affairs; He knew the nature and tendency of his own Philosophy; that it would soon become suspected and odious to a Government, if ever Atheists were employed in places of Trust. But because He had made one great Rule superior to all, *That every man's only Good was pleasure of Body and contentment of Mind*; hence it was that men of ambitious and turbulent Spirits, that were dissatisfied and uneasy with Privacy and Retirement, were allowed by his own Principle to engage in matters of State. And there they generally met with that fortune, which their Master foresaw. Several Cities of *Greece* that had made experiment of them in Publick Concerns, drove them out, as Incendjaries and Pests of Commonweals, by

Plutarch.
Ad de Sto-
icis.
Lucr. &c.

Plutarch.
On idyl.
in Stoic. Cy-
Cic. &c.

by severe Edicts and Proclamations. Atheism is by no means tolerable in the most private condition: but if it aspire to authority and power; if it acquire the Command of an Army or a Navy; if it get upon the Bench or into the Senate, or on a Throne: what then can be expected, but the basest Cowardise and Treachery, but the foulest prevarication in Justice, but betraying and selling the Rights and Liberties of a People, but arbitrary Government and tyrannical Oppression? Nay if Atheism were once, as I may say, the National Religion; it would make its own Followers the most miserable of men; it would be the Kingdom of Satan divided against it self; and the Land would be soon brought to desolation. *Josephus*, that knew them, Josephus de Bello Judaico, l. 2. c. 12. hath inform'd us, that the Sadducees, those Epicureans among the Jews, were not only rough and cruel to men of a different Sect from their own; but perfidious and inhuman one towards another. This is the genuine spirit and the natural product of Atheism. No man, that adheres to that narrow and selfish Principle, can ever be Just or Generous or Grateful; * unless he be sometime overcome by Good-nature and a happy Constitution. No Atheist, as such, can be a true Friend, an affectionate Relation, or a loyal Subject. The appearance and shew of mutual Amity among them, is wholly owing to

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* Si sibi ipse consentiat, et non interdum natura bonitate vincitur. Cic. de Offic. l. 2.

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the smallness of their number, and to the obligations of a Faction. 'Tis like the Friendship of Pick-pockets and High-way Men, that are said to observe strict Justice among themselves, and never to defraud a Comrade of his share of the Booty. But if we could imagin a whole Nation to be Cut-purses and Robbers; would there then be kept that square-dealing and equity in such a monstrous *den of Thieves*? And if Atheism should be supposed to become universal in this Nation (which seems to be design'd and endeavour'd, though we know the gates of Hell shall not be able to prevail) farewell all Ties of Friendship and Principles of Honour; all Love for our Country and Loyalty to our Prince; nay, farewell all Government and Society it self, all Professions and Arts, and Conveniencies of Life, all that is laudable or valuable in the World.

And now having in the first place explained the Words of the *Text*, and secondly detected the mere *Deists* of our Age to be no better than disguised *Atheists* (seeing they have now no pretence to the *Deism* of *Epicurus* ;) and afterwards having shown, that willingly to entertain the *Hypothesis of Atheism* (which is literally to choose Death and Evil, before Life and Good, and to love Darknes rather than Light) is the most absurd and inconsiderate Folly ; and that there is nothing to excuse so silly a Choice : Nor any

Deut. 30.

^{15.}
Joh. 3. 10.

any *Necessity* of it; for Religion doth not impose any Articles of Faith that are repugnant to our Faculties, and incredible to Natural Reason: Not *Interest*; because Religion it self is even in this Present Life the truest and best Interest as well of every *single Person* (for a Christian's Belief is the most comfortable, and his Hope the most glorious of all Men's, and the Practical Duties he is obliged to, are in themselves agreeable to his Nature, and conducive to his Temporal Happiness) as of *Communities and Governments*; because Religion is not only usefull to Civil Society, but fundamentally necessary to its very Birth and Constitution: Having, I say, competently proved these Particulars, as far as the usual brevity of such Discourses will allow; I shall conclude all with one short Reflection, That if *Atheism* or modern *Deism* be evinced to be *Folly*, how great must that *Folly* be? It must not be bare *Folly*, but *Madness* and *Distraction*. Nor do we need to recurr to the *Stoical* Paradox, *That all Fools are mad*; Nor to that Saying of one of their own Party, who (not out of Derision, as some would have it, but out of Complement to the Publick) call'd it *Insanientem sapientiam*, the *Mad Philosophy* of *Atheism*. For so sottishly to lose the purest Pleasures and Comforts of *this* World, and forego the Expectation of Immortality in *another*;

other; and so desperately to run the Risk of *dwelling with everlasting Burnings*, it plainly discovers it self to be what it is; it is manifestly the most pernicious *Folly* and deplorable *Madness* in the World.

May the Father of Mercies and God of Infinite Wisdom reduce the Foolish from their Errors, and make them wise unto Salvation; Confirm the Sceptical and wavering Minds, and so prevent Us, that stand fast, in all our doings, and further us with his continual help, that we may not be of them that draw back unto Perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the Soul. Amen.

F I N I S.

